```
VZCZCXRO7721
OO RUEHCI
DE RUEHKT #0087/01 0221215
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 221215Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7856
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6271
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 6598
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1861
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 4624
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5859
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2165
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 3987
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1971
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 3072
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
```

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 000087

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2017
TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM EAID NP
SUBJECT: NEPAL ELECTION: 79 DAYS TO GO

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy J. Powell. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

¶1. (C) With just over 11 weeks to go until Nepal's
rescheduled Constituent Assembly election, the Election
Commission has announced the electoral schedule and is moving
ahead in reviving the election machinery. But the parties
have yet to move into high gear. Many continue to doubt that
the election will be held -- citing various potential
spoilers, including the King, the Nepali Congress, the
Maoists and, most commonly, the trouble in the Terai. Post
is operating under the assumption the election will be held
April 10, as scheduled.

Election Date and Schedule Announced

¶2. (U) On January 11, the Government of Nepal (GON) announced
that the twice-postponed Constituent Assembly election would
be held on April 10. The announcement came exactly 90 days
prior to the poll date, which was the minimum advance warning
the Election Commission (EC) had requested. On January 13,
the EC released the election schedule. As in fall 2007,
there are separate schedules for the first-past-the-post
(FPTP) and the proportional (PR) parts of the election. Key
deadlines over the next 11 weeks (79 days) are as follows:

February 20 -- Parties to submit candidate lists to EC (PR)
February 25 -- Parties to register candidate nominations with
EC (FPTP)
February 26 -- EC to publish candidate nominations (FPTP)
February 27 -- EC to complete review of candidate lists (PR)
February 28 -- EC to complete review of candidate nominations
(FPTP)
February 28 -- EC to publish names of candidates (FPTP)
March 1 -- Deadline for parties to withdraw names of
candidates (FPTP)
March 1 -- EC to publish final candidate lists (FPTP)
March 2 -- EC to assign electoral symbols (FPTP)
March 5 -- Parties to submit corrected candidate lists (PR)
March 6 -- EC to publish candidate lists (PR)
March 23 -- Deadline for parties to withdraw names from
candidate lists (PR)

March 25 -- EC to publish final candidate lists after public
comment (PR)
March 25 -- EC to assign electoral symbols (PR)
April 10 -- Election Day

Election Schedule: Comment

¶3. (C) The first deadline -- to submit candidate lists for
the 335 PR seats -- is February 20. On October 7, 2007, the
date on which the PR candidate lists were due for the planned
November 22 election, the governing Six-Party Alliance and
the Maoists decided to postpone the election. Last time
there were 41 days from that first deadline until election
day. This time around there are 43 days. It is worth noting
that the election schedule for the FPTP seats is tighter than
the PR schedule. It starts later (February 25) and finishes
sooner (March 2). This is because the EC will have to print
240 different FPTP ballots, one for each of the 240 FPTP
constituencies. In contrast, there will be only one PR
ballot for the entire country.

Election Commission Gearing Up

¶4. (SBU) On January 12, the EC announced that the Election
Code of Conduct would come into effect for the Government of
Nepal (GON) on January 16. It would come into effect for the
political parties (or individuals) from the date on which
they filed candidate lists (February 20 or 25). In spite of
a reported request by representatives from some of the main
political parties to the EC to delay, the Code of Conduct
came into effect as scheduled. (Note: The principal result

is that the GON is barred from transferring officials and
beginning new projects which might improperly influence the
election, although the EC has already granted at least two
waivers. End note.) According to the UN Mission in Nepal's
Senior Election Adviser, Fidah Nasrullah, the EC had already
begun re-transferring ballot boxes to the 10 districts that
had put them into storage. It has already finished packaging
polling kits to be sent to the districts by the end of
January.

Parties Still Slow To Move

¶5. (C) With a few exceptions, the political parties have yet
to move into high gear. As promised in the 23-Point
Agreement in late December, the Six-Party Alliance and the
Maoists have begun holding seven mass election rallies. The
first, organized by Prime Minister Koirala's center-right
Nepali Congress (NC) in Kathmandu on January 14, was
uninspiring. The NC claimed they would be able to draw up to
500,000, but ended up with perhaps fewer than 10,000. The
NC's no. 2 leader, former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba,
was booed by a crowd that was dominated by Maoists. A
bombing near the rally site downtown that injured eight only
added to the pall. The second mass rally, on January 19 in
Biratnagar in the eastern Terai, which the center-left
Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (UML) put
together, was much more successful. Approximately 100,000
participated, according to press reports. Likewise, the
small, Madhesi-based Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Ananda Devi)
coordinated a rally January 21 in Bhairahawa, in the western
Terai, with a similarly-sized crowd.

Maoist Preparations Taking Center Stage

¶6. (C) The Maoists are responsible for the next mass rally,
on January 24 in Dhangadhi, in the far western Terai. They,
in fact, have dominated media reports on election preparation
by the parties. Beginning with a several-day Central
Committee meeting in early January in which the party's

commitment to elections was allegedly emphasized, followed by
pre-election training on January 19 for several hundred
Maoist leaders under Maoist chief Pushpa Dahal (aka
Prachanda), it is the Maoist efforts which are in the news.
The NC, meanwhile is facing a very public dispute between
those in its ranks, generally associated with the rump
monarchist wing of the party, who see the NC as going too far
to accommodate the Maoists, and the rest of the party. The
Prime Minister himself is under fire for his appointment of
his daughter Sujata, who has publicly taken a pro-monarchy
line, as Minister Without Portfolio. His current bout of
serious illness has also set the party back. Meanwhile, the
UML, which was widely seen as the best prepared party the
last time around has yet to fully mobilize its cadre,
according to the National Democratic Institute.

Comment: Election Still in Doubt

¶7. (C) In spite of the GON's announcement of an April 10
Constituent Assembly election date and the EC's proclamation
of the revised election schedule, many observers, including
senior party representatives, continue to doubt whether an
election will actually take place. Many Nepali leaders are
convinced that King Gyanendra is doing his utmost to prevent
the election from occurring, and point to recent statements
by some Indian leaders on the need to preserve Nepal's
monarchy and to violence in the Terai as evidence. Others
see the continuing internal difficulties of the NC, which has
yet to complete its September 2007 reunification with the
former NC-Democratic, as another reason why an election is
unlikely. PM Koirala's current bout of ill health gives
little comfort. Many, particularly in the NC, but also
UMLers, fear that, even if the Maoists do end up filing
candidacies, they will pull out at the last minute when it
becomes apparent that they will do poorly in the polls.
Everyone is worried that violence in the Terai will derail

KATHMANDU 00000087 003 OF 003

election plans. Despite our own misgivings, post is
operating under the assumption for now that the election will
take place as scheduled.
POWELL